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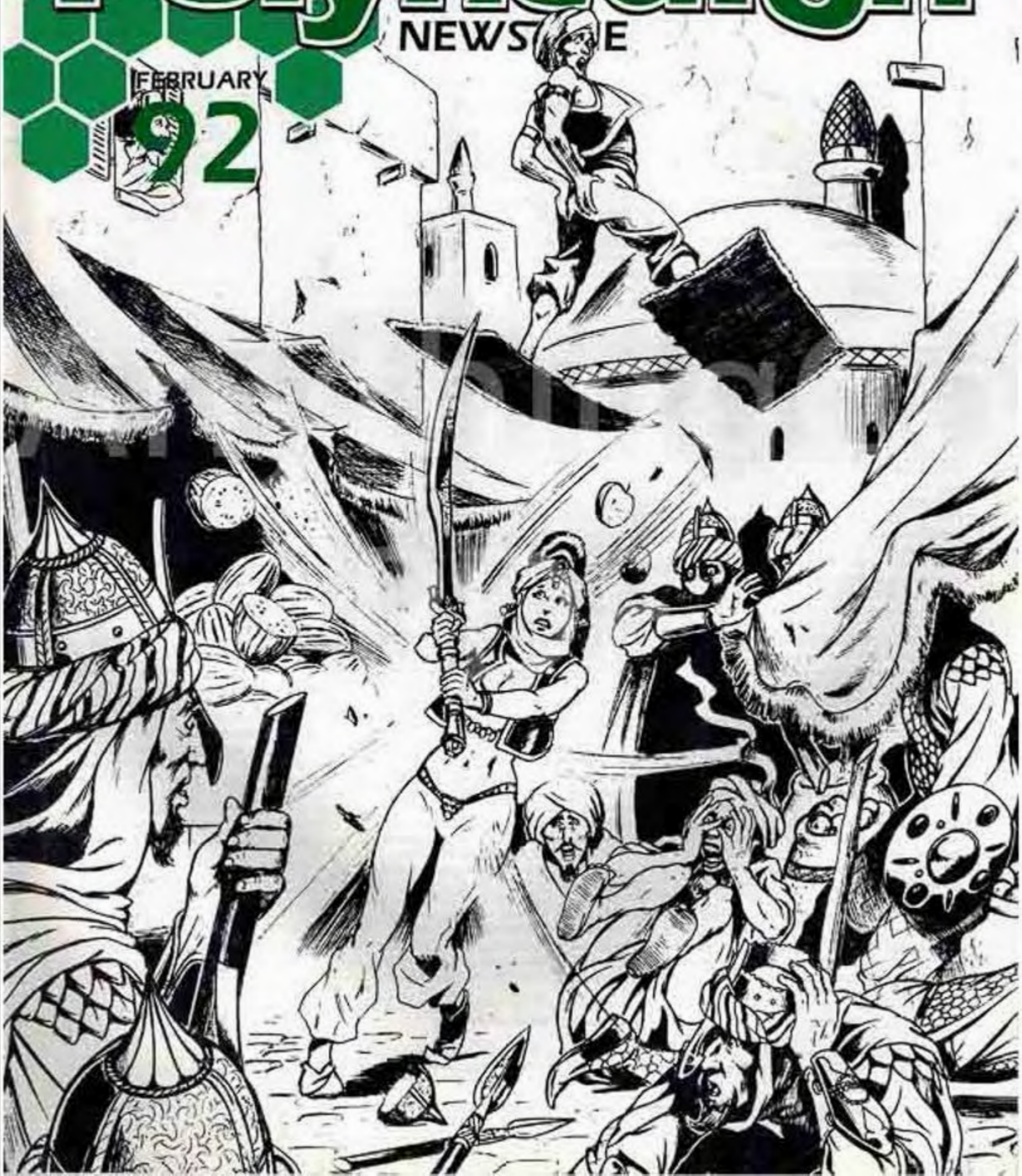

About the Cover

A surprised Zakharan woman discovers the powers of a *weapon of prowess* (detailed in this issue), much to the dismay of the others in the market. James Holloway illustrated this month's Arabesque cover.

Publisher
Rick Behling

Editor
Jean Rabe

Associate Editor
Dave Gross

Graphic Director
Larry Smith

Production Staff
Paul Hanchette
Tracey Isler
Kevin Melka

Subscriptions
Charmaine Snyder

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Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

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River Rats

A GREYHAWK® Setting Adventure for Player Characters of 4th to 6th Level

by Keith Polster

Players' Introduction

You sit in the conference room of the Greyhawk Adventurers Guild, waiting for an assignment that will bring you gold and fame. After all, that's why you joined the guild. Members are assigned to investigate ruins, explore dungeons, and slay dragons—all ventures that yield treasure.

Your wait is short. Waltzing across the chamber toward you, his head bathed in a blue-gray fog of cigar smoke, is the assistant guildmaster. The dwarf glares at you disdainfully.

"So, you maggots," bellows Zuaak in a voice that will echo in your head for days. "I hope ye're ready for yer next assignment!"

Finishing off the first putrid cigar and pulling out another, the dwarf continues. "This is an important job I'm about ta give ya scum, so you'd better listen up. And if ya do good, maybe ye'll get yourselves out of da gutter. Last night I got a visit from Lord Zoran Sarraith, a rich Rhennee who forked out a big retainer for da guild ta do a job with no questions asked. Ye're ta meet him at da River Rat, a central gathering place for Rhennee in the river quarter. It's along da Strip, and it's full of Rhennee, so watch your P's and Q's about their strange customs or ye'll end up as rat food on da bank of da Selintan."

Zuaak takes a bite out of his cigar, swallows it, and adds, "Ya lumps belong to Lord Zoran for the next week. I sure hope ye last!" With a wicked snicker and a belch, the repugnant dwarf leaves.

DM Background

The player characters are being set up. Several years ago, Lord Zoran located the *hasty barge of Nyr Dyv*. This magical barge is an ancient relic of the Rhennee with special powers that allow it to travel fast and far, with

little chance of it being attacked by monsters in the Nyr Dyv. Zoran stole the *hasty barge* from a Rhennee named Dolcan Esquard, whom he killed during the theft.

Zoran wanted the *hasty barge* so he could better serve his masters, the Cult of the Shriven Sickle. The members of the Shriven Sickle faithfully serve Nerull, the god of darkness, death, and dissolution. The cult was pleased when Zoran announced he had the *barge*. But as of yesterday the cult is very upset. The *hasty barge* has been stolen again, and Zoran has no clue who took it.

During the adventure, the PCs will be under the watchful eye of Grotnek Urtekknis, a brutal half-orc mercenary employed by the Shriven Sickle. Grotnek and the forces of the Shriven Sickle will shadow the PCs until they have recovered the *hasty barge*, then they will try to dispose of the heroes. The Sickle opposes witnesses.

You leave the guild headquarters and walk down the Strip toward your appointment. Shadows coat the streets as night comes to the city. Eyes peer out from the darkness as you journey deeper into the Strip, and the few souls you encounter are uncouth and seedy. Your journey abruptly ends as you find yourselves before the battered structure called the River Rat. Loud laughter and song spills from the place.

The windows of the building are boarded up, and several unconscious people lie sprawled in front of this disgusting establishment. While you take in the scenery, the laughing ceases, the swinging doors burst open, and a drunken patron is tossed out into the street, sliding a couple of feet in the fresh mud to rest before you. After a short pause, the laughing and shouting of obscenities from within again rises to a roar.

When the PCs enter the River Rat, all conversation ceases and the patrons stare at the newcomers. After several silent moments, the chatter begins again. The patrons never quiet down for long. The River Rat is crowded, and the PCs will have to elbow their way up to the bar.

None of the Rhennee patrons will have anything to do with the PCs; however, the bartender is willing to point out Lord Zoran if the PCs ask.

You look where the bartender points and see a finely-dressed Rhennee. As he begins to speak, you notice a large scar curving from just below his left ear to his throat.

"I am Lord Zoran," he begins. "I presume you are from the guild? I do not believe you've been told my problem, so I will start at the beginning. A barge that has been in my family for more three generations was stolen from its dock at Barge End last night. During the bloody theft, two of my closest friends were slain and my wives were beaten and tossed overboard. I wish my barge returned, and I am willing to pay handsomely for it. If you bring this barge back, I will see that Zuaak gives you each 700 gold for your troubles, with an additional 300 gold each if you bring back the head of the scoundrel who beat my wives.

"I and all of my children were born upon that barge, and I mean to have it back! I have business to attend to before you depart, so I shall meet you at Barge End in 30 minutes. Do not be late." Lord Zoran nimbly springs to his feet and ducks out a side door, leaving you to exit this hole on your own.

Barge End

Barge End is a docking place for the Rhennee's barges in the murky, mosquito-infested Selintan backwater. When the PCs arrive, two of Zoran's lackeys escort them to the lord's pursuit vessel, where they are presented to Lord Zoran and Dmitri Valonis, the vessel's captain for this mission.

The scent of the stagnant waters of the Selintan fills your nostrils as the guides take you to Lord Zoran. As you travel deeper into Barge End, you see more than 40 barges docked along the back water wharf. Your guides escort you across a few scattered planks and onto the deck of an impressive two-masted barge. Standing on the deck, flanked by several Rhennee, is your employer.

Getting right down to business, Zoran gestures to the man on his right, "This is Dmitri Valonis, one of the fastest bargewrights on the Selintan. You are to help our combined crews assure the return of my barge. This two-masted barge, the Dyvwraith, will easily catch the thieves in two days, before the scoundrels can lose themselves in Wooly Bay. You leave at first light, and do not forget the bonus!"

After a few words with his men, Lord Zoran disappears into the night mist. A Rhennee tells you to stow your gear and get a few hours of sleep, for you leave at first light.

The Dyvwraith is manned by nine Rhennee. Four of these men are members of Lord Zoran's personal guard but are not members of the Shriven Sickle. The remaining five are Dmitri and his master bargewrights. None of the crew are members of the cult of Nerull. They are of honorable Rhennee background and will follow the words of Dmitri to the letter.

Zoran's guards (4): AC 6; MV 12; HD 4 (F4); hp 24 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (long sword); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL NE

These men were told to make sure all of the thieves of the *hasty barge* are killed and to help Grotnek slay the PCs after the barge has been retrieved. These men are Zoran's regular crew on the *hasty barge*, and they know how to pilot the magical craft. They are also familiar with Grotnek and his squad. The barge men speak little with the PCs during the journey. Observant PCs notice that the crew does not mingle with them.

Dmitri Valonis: AC 4 (leather armor +2); MV 12; HD 7 (F7); hp 45; THACO 14; #AT: 1; Dmg: 1-8 +2 (*long sword* +2); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL N

Dmitri wears a *medallion of ESP* that can be used three times a day.

Dmitri is 24 years old, 5'1" tall, and weighs 130 lbs. Despite his small size, this Rhennee is the best bargewright in the Greyhawk area. Since his latest barge race victory, Dmitri has acquired quite a following among the Rhennee and has decided to help Lord Zoran only to prove that he can accomplish something that the Rhennee lord cannot. Since Rhennee lordship is based on one's power and deeds, Dmitri has much to gain by returning the barge.

Dmitri seeks to further his power base at any cost. He treats the PCs well, but does not reveal much regarding his goals. He is polite to any spellcasters, for they are rare and their favors are considered a means of gaining power among the Rhennee. As far as the

mission is concerned, Dmitri follows Zoran's orders until he is betrayed or until he can change the rules of the game to better suit his own needs.

Dmitri's Barge Crew (4): AC 7; MV 12; HD 5 (F5); hp 30 each; THACO 17; #AT: 1; Dmg 1-8+1 (long sword + STR bonus); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL N

These men are loyal to Dmitri and are his hand-picked crew of talented bargewrights. They are all Rhennee, and they will speak rarely to the PCs, as sailing the barge consumes most of their time. However, if the player characters befriend Dmitri, the crew will treat the PCs with mild respect. The opposite applies if Dmitri holds the PCs in low regard. Each of these men carries a long sword and knife and 4d10 gold coins.

The River Blue

Allow the player characters to spend time role playing with members of the crew for the remainder of the day. When it gets near sunset, read the following:

> The gypsy folk move their craft quickly through the placid waters of the Selintan. When the crew finally anchors near the center of the river, one of Dmitri's men tells you this is to reduce the likelihood of a bandit attack. As the daylight fades, the bright moon Raenei glimmers overhead, sending fleeting shadows across the calm river water.
>
> As you start to settle in for the night, you are interrupted by Dmitri.
>
> "As you can see my friends, it is a splendid evening. I do not wish to cast a pall on the atmosphere, but I believe we are being followed. A group of men on the river road has been shadowing us since we left Greyhawk." As he points off the port bow, you see the flickering light of a campfire.

Dmitri and the Rhennee are confident they are in no danger where they are anchored. However, the lord would not object to the PCs investigating the camp. If the player characters decide to do so, they must swim to the shore 35 feet away. If the party does nothing, the night passes without incident.

The men following the party are Lord Zoran's assassin squad lead by Grotnek. With the help of their Shriven Sickle contacts, Grotnek and his men obtained uniforms of the Greyhawk Nightwatch Patrol, and are wearing them now. If the PCs approach them, Grotnek and his men present themselves as official members of the Greyhawk Guard with (forged) papers giving them authority to patrol along River Road. As far as the party is concerned, everything looks in order. If the party attacks, Grotnek's men fight to the death while Grotnek escapes.

Grotnek Urtekknis: AC −2 (field plate +1, DEX bonus); MV 9; HD 8 (F8, T8); hp 76; THACO 9; #AT 3/2; Dmg: 1-10+5 (*two-handed sword* +2, STR bonus); SA X4 backstab; SD Nil; AL NE

Grotnek has the following thieving skills: PP 50, OL 55, FT 55, MS 70, HS 50, DN 30, CW 90, RL 15. He carries a *potion of healing* and wears a *necklace of missiles* with one 5-dice missile remaining.

Grotnek is 6'10" tall with thick, black, wavy hair and brown eyes. He weighs a remarkable 352 lbs with not an ounce of fat on him. This repulsive thief chews tobacco and spits great plugs while he talks. His clothes are constantly sweat-stained and malodorous, while his greasy hair falls uncombed around his deep-set coal eyes.

During this encounter, Grotnek will control his considerable temper, but he will throw a tantrum once the party is gone or after he escapes. Although he is the main muscle of the Shriven Sickle, Grotnek watches out for Grotnek above everyone else.

Grotnek's Grunts: AC 6 (leather & DEX 16); MV 12; HD 4 (F4, T3); hp 15 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6+1 (short sword + 1; SA X2 backstab; SD Nil; AL NE

These men also carry light crossbows with 10 bolts, as well as 2d10 silver coins. Two of the men have bruises covering their faces (the results of Grotnek's bad temper), and each has a scar running from below the ear ending near the throat. These scars are the mark of the Shriven Sickle and are identical to the scar on Lord Zoran. The only way the PCs will see these scars is if they capture or kill the grunts.

The Roaring Rapids

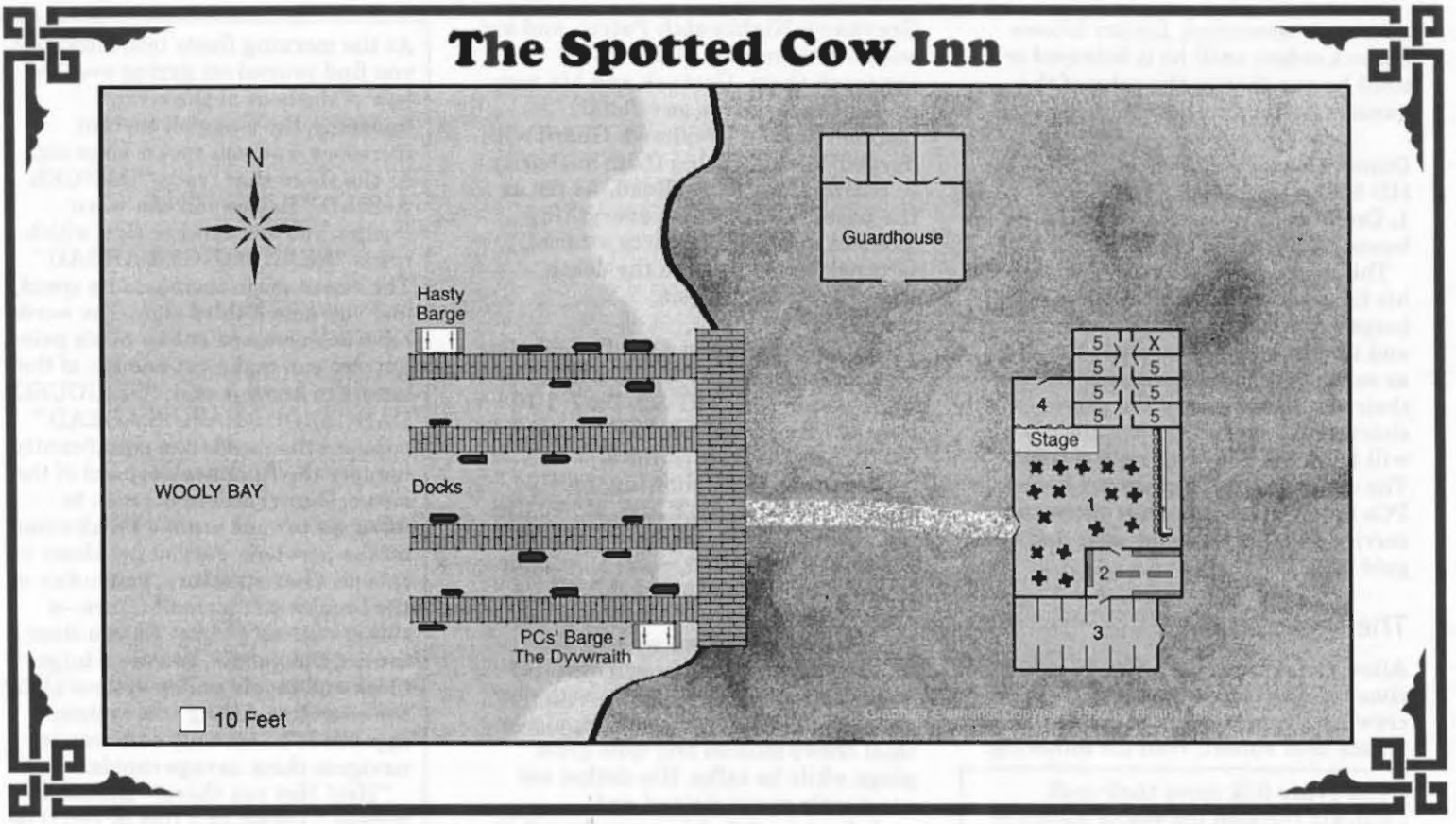
The following morning the PCs get an early start down the Selintan River.

> As the morning floats into afternoon, you find yourselves gazing over the bow of the boat at the river. Suddenly, the sluggish current increases, and you spot a large sign on the shore that reads "DANGER AHEAD." Before you can warn Dmitri, you see another sign which reads "REAL DANGER AHEAD." The water again increases its speed, and you note a third sign. The words have been crossed out by black paint, but you can make out enough of the letters to know it said, "SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS RAPIDS AHEAD."
>
> Before the rapids can significantly hamper the Rhennee's control of the barge, Dmitri orders his men to navigate toward a stone breakwater off the port bow. As you get closer to this peculiar structure, you notice on the breakwater a small figure—a rather excited gnome. As you steer toward the gnome, you see a huge block and tackle pulley system along the shoreline. Using this system appears to be the only safe way to navigate these savage rapids.
>
> "Hey! Hey you there!" shouts the gnome. "Throw us a line or you'll be wrecked!" You notice that Dmitri reluctantly gives the order to throw the gnome a line.

Any attempt to run the rapids causes the barge to capsize—even though the rapids are not what they seem. Several years ago a brass dragon devised a get-rich-quick plan that would take advantage of all travelers up and down the Selintan River by requiring them to pay for a barge steering service. With the help of a few *earthquake* spells in a *ring of spell storing*, the dragon created his own rapids by altering the pitch and speed of the river. The nearby residents believe the whole process occurred naturally. The dragon and his gnome helpers use illusions to make the rapids seem even fiercer than they are.

This deception has been going on for several years, and only a few of the regular river travelers (including Dmitri) know the secret. They don't, however, wish to upset the dragon by exposing him, so they pay the fees of the barge steering service and continue on their way.

There are seven gnomes involved in the operation, all working for the dragon, magically disguised as the gnome on the breakwater. He goes by the name of Walter Simkins.



The steering process requires nearly 20 minutes of block and tackle pulling, with most of the hard work being faked by the gnomes. During this time, Walter chats with the PCs. He wants to know what they are doing on the river, what they think of the rapids, and what is the current state of politics in Greyhawk. If the PCs try to disbelieve the rapids, Walter becomes angry and threatens that "Nasty things can happen to people who don't consider the rapids fierce and awesome. Nasty things can happen to people who don't pay the barge steering fee."

If the PCs truly upset Walter, Dmitri tries to intercede and begs the PCs to apologize. Walter demands 10 gp per player character—in addition to the barge steering fee. If the PCs refuse, the dragon sinks Dmitri's barge. This will force the PCs to find new transportation to continue the adventure.

On the other hand, if the PCs befriend Walter in his gnome form, he chats pleasantly with them. Some of his phrases include:

"Hey, nice weather we're having, huh?"

"Do you guys fish? I caught a big one yesterday! As big as this barge. It was tasty."

"Are you fellows looking for the bandits in the area?

"Are you following those other Rhennee that came through here yesterday?"

"Do you know you're being followed?"

"I hear the mayor of Greyhawk is being bribed by the Carpenters' Guild."

"Does it still smell like dead rats in the city?"

Walter's ramblings continue until the barge reaches the far side of the rapids, or until the PCs press Walter for further information. If questioned about any of the above quips, Walter's memory suddenly gets foggy until a few coins are pressed into his greedy palm.

If properly bribed and questioned, Walter has the following additional information:

"A very fast barge crewed by at least six men came through the rapids yesterday. The men on it seemed quite pleased with themselves." Walter didn't learn much from them, as he did most of the talking.

Human and demi-human bandits are common around here, but they leave Walter and his gnomes alone.

"Four or five men are following you. They look like Greyhawk guards, but they're definitely out of their jurisdiction. Their commander is pretty bad-tempered for a military officer."

Walter Simkins, Brass Dragon: AC −1; MV 12, fl 30; HD 10; hp 65; THACO 11; #AT 3 + special; Dmg 1-6 + 5/1-6 + 5/4-16 + 5; SA Breath weapon 10d4 + 5, tail slap, wing buffet; SD Nil; MR 15%; S S as gnome, G as dragon; AL CG (neutral tendencies)

Spells carried: *Change self, alter self*

Walter would rather talk than fight, but if his secret about the rapids is threatened, he will turn violent. The barge steering service is Walter's means of increasing his horde, and he doesn't want it jeopardized.

Walter's Gnomes (7): AC 10; MV 12; HD 2 (I2); hp 6 each; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA Nil; SD Nil; AL NG

Spells carried: *Phantasmal force, audible glamer*

The gnomes help Walter create the illusion of the rapids because they are paid well for relatively little work. They attempt to avoid conversation with river travelers, as they are afraid they will burst out laughing at the travelers' gullibility.

The gnomes constructed the block and

tackle rig, and it is sturdy in design. If the river were truly filled with savage rapids, this method of traversing the raging water would work.

Docking for the Night

The evening after the PCs encounter Walter, they arrive at the edge of Wooly Bay, near the Spotted Cow Inn. Dmitri steers the barge toward the docks.

> You realize your time is running short as the setting sun glimmers off the edge of Wooly Bay. Just ahead is the famed Spotted Cow Inn, the last stop for weary river travelers before they brave the depths of the gigantic bay. If your elusive adversary has not lost himself in the deep waters, he may yet be found replenishing his supplies at the Spotted Cow.

Jacque Esquard and his crew are indeed at the Spotted Cow Inn, prematurely celebrating their escape from Greyhawk. As the PCs' barge docks among the many craft here, one of Lord Zoran's men spots the *hasty barge* docked on the far side of the wharf. Six of Jacque's crew are guarding the craft haphazardly, drinking and laughing loudly in the slowly gathering darkness.

What the player characters do is up to them. They can confront Jacque or they can try to take the barge and run. The Rhennee will let the PCs decide the best course of action.

If the PCs immediately try to steal the *hasty barge*, Jacque's guards suffer a −2 to their surprise rolls because they are tipsy. This will give the PCs an edge. If the PCs dally on the docks, however, a patrol of armed guards passes within four rounds. Now the PCs will have to devise a distraction, as the guards have a 75% chance of noticing the PCs near the *hasty barge* and sounding the alarm. The guards fight until more than half of them are slain, then the remainder escape to bring reinforcements. Reinforcements consist of four guards arriving every four rounds until a total of 32 guards have been called.

Jacque's Tipsy Guards (4): AC 8; MV 12; HD 4 (F4); hp 20 each; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (long sword); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL LN

These guards are −1 on all attack, damage, and reaction rolls because of their condition.

Guards of the Spotted Cow (8): AC 5 (chain mail); MV 9; HD 2 (F2); hp 10 each; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (long sword); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL LN

These guards patrol the wharfs and grounds belonging to the owner of the Spotted Cow Inn. They do not accept bribes, and they are well paid for their services. Guard reinforcements use the same statistics.

The Wharf

There are 60 boats docked here, clearly showing the inn's popularity among the river folk.

Any trouble going on at the wharf has a 20% chance to be reported by wandering patrons. The inn's proprietor offers an "all you can drink" reward for anyone helping to prevent thefts and fights. There are at least two guards here at all times.

The Spotted Cow

The Spotted Cow Inn is the pride and joy of Ivan Lockswell. The establishment is prized by many river and bay travelers. Located just northwest of Hardby, the inn boasts a hearty crowd of 35 patrons this evening, many of which are regulars. The remainder of Jacque's crew, including Jacque himself, are inside the inn, resting and planning their return home in the morning. As the PCs enter the inn, one of Jacque's men alertly spots them and slips away unnoticed to warn his master.

When Jacque realizes that the jig is up, he sets the inn afire in an attempt to escape pursuit in the panic that will follow. Consult the map when referencing the following areas.

1. The Bar

This is the largest section of the inn, serving as a bar and dining room. Tonight the tables are packed with fishermen and merchants of the Wooly Bay. Several comely barmaids dash between tables, while a group of performers enchant the crowd with a cheery drinking tune. There appear to be no Rhennee in the place, except for any whom the player characters might have brought with them from their barge. Drinking to the good health of his patrons, Ivan easily can be picked out of the crowd.

2. The Kitchen

This room also serves as a storage area for the inn's many supplies, including several kegs of ale. Ivan's wife, Kika, and his only daughter, Sara, constantly run between this room and the bar. A door at the north wall leads to the stables.

3. Stables

Resting in the stalls are nine horses belonging to various patrons. Tending to the horses is Ivan's youngest son, Ivan Junior. Two guards are always within earshot.

4. Entertainer's Room

A thick wool curtain separates this section from the main bar. A few musicians and some of Ivan's favorite dancing girls rehearse their acts in this quaintly-furnished room. When the PCs arrive, a father-and-son juggling team and Belinda the Belly Dancer are waiting here to perform.

5. Boarding Rooms

This newly-added section of the inn has several boarding rooms, half of which are occupied. The room where Jacque and his men are staying is marked on the map with an "X." After Jacque starts the fire in the hallway between rooms, he and his men exit through his room's southern window. They flee to the *hasty barge*, and then to the waters of the Wooly Bay if they are able. See "The Fire," below.

The Fire

If the PCs have been spotted by one of Jacque's men, Jacque uses his last missile from his *necklace of missiles* (5-dice missile) to start the fire. After crawling through the window, Jacque screams "Fire!" to draw the attention of the eight-man guard patrol outside the nearby guardhouse, creating a panic. Use the statistics of the guards presented earlier.

The building's dry wood ignites quickly, catching the attention of everyone near the docks.

Jacque will reach the *hasty barge* six rounds after starting the fire. It will take him an additional two rounds to get the craft away from the docks and out on the river. Four rounds later, Jacque and his *hasty barge* are considered lost in the darkness.

The fire will take almost an hour to get under control. It will be up to the PCs whether they fight the blaze or attempt to stop the barge.

If the PCs have acted quickly enough to reach the *hasty barge* before it disappears in the night, Jacque orders

his men to fight to defend the craft. Jacque joins in the battle if necessary.

If the PCs are successful, and they return the *hasty barge* to Dmitri, the bargewright will be ecstatic. Lord Zoran secretly instructs Grotnek and his grunts to eliminate the PCs so there will be no witnesses who are not members of the Shriven Sickle.

Jacque Esquard AC 5 (*studded leather +1*); MV 12; HD 8 (F8); hp 42; THACO 13; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8+1 (*scimitar +1*); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL LN

Jacque is of mixed Rhennee stock, 32 years old, 5' 9" tall, and 150 lbs. From the city of Fax on the Wild Coast, Jacque has searched for years for the *hasty barge*, which used to belong to his father. Jacque's father died at the hands of Lord Zoran, and he believes that keeping the *barge* from Zoran is only just.

Jacque's Followers (7): AC 6 (studded leather); MV 12; HD 4 (F4); hp 42; THACO 13; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8 (long sword); SA Nil; SD Nil; AL N

Grotnek and the Grunts

Grotnek strikes just when the PCs think they have completed their assignment and can go home. However, Grotnek not only goes after the PCs, but also turns on Dmitri. Grotnek wants to claim all the credit for retrieving the barge.

If the PCs fought Grotnek's men before, assume that he gathered more from the ranks of the Sickle. Use the same statistics for Grotnek's grunts presented in an earlier encounter. Grotnek and his men attempt to strike with surprise, attacking any spell casters first. If any of Dmitri's crew is still alive, they quickly change loyalties and strike against the PCs and Dmitri, too, in an effort to save their skins.

If the PCs defeat Grotnek, his grunts, and Dmitri's men, they can take the *hasty barge* and return to Greyhawk. If it looks like the PCs are going to lose the fight, allow reasonable attempts to escape to succeed.

Conclusion

If the PCs come back to Greyhawk with the *hasty barge,* city officials take possession of it. After several hours of deliberation, the High Council of the Rhennee orders that, until this matter can be referred to the Rhennee in Fax on the Wild Coast, the *hasty barge* will be held by the Greyhawk Adventurers Guild. That's the good news.

Weary from your ordeal, you reluctantly drag your feet back to the Greyhawk Adventurers Guild to report. Once in that all-too-familiar conference room, Zuaak calmly saunters over with a considerable grin on his homely kisser.

"Well, well, well," Zuaak chuckles. "It seems you cow pies finally did something right. You brought back da stolen barge, and it turns out to be the one and only *hasty barge of the Nyr Dyv.* I'm impressed! It's too bad, though, dat you guys don't get paid. Lord Zoran ain't around to cover the commission. Maybe you'll get a reward after possession of da *hasty barge* is decided by da Rhennee Councils of Greyhawk and Fax."

Pulling out one of those nauseating cigars, the beaming dwarf concludes, "And da way they argue, that reward should come through sometime in da next 30 years!" As Zuaak struts out the door, your hands rifle through your pockets in search of anything you can pawn for a meal.